

29. An apparatus for connecting tubulars, comprising;
a top drive;
a body having a first and second section;
one or more recesses disposed about an outer diameter of the second section;
and
a radially expandable gripping element disposed with each recess.
30. The apparatus of claim 29, wherein the first section comprises a splined recess into which a splined connecting member may be located.
31. The apparatus of claim 29, wherein the gripping elements are radially expandable with pressurized hydraulic or pneumatic fluid.
32. The apparatus of claim 29, wherein the gripping elements are radially expanded to engage an inner surface of a tubular.
33. The apparatus of claim 32, further comprising one or more compensating pistons, wherein the pistons are pneumatically operable and adjustable to compensate for different weights of the tubular.
34. The apparatus of claim 29, wherein the body is connected to the top drive.
35. The apparatus of claim 34, wherein the top drive provides rotational torque to permit a screw connection between one or more tubulars.

REMARKS

This is intended as a full and complete response to the Final Office Action dated September 14, 2001. Claims 1-7, 9-16 and 26-35 are pending in the application and stand rejected. Applicants have cancelled claims 1-14. The cancellation of claims 1-14 is not an admission of non-patentability of the cancelled claims. Applicants have simply canceled the claims to reduce issues for appeal and to place the application in condition

for allowance. Applicants have also enclosed a substitute specification to correct the informalities addressed by the Examiner and have proposed amendments to Figures 2, 4, and 5. Please enter these amendments and reconsider the remaining claims pending in the application for reasons discussed below.

Claims 1, 3-9 and 14-16 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(a) as being anticipated by *Gjebedo* (WO 98/11322). The Examiner states that *Gjebedo* discloses an inflatable elastomeric gripping member that also functions as a sealing packer.

Applicants respectfully traverse the rejection. Applicants have cancelled claims 1-14 for reasons stated above. Regarding claims 15-16, *Gjebedo* discloses an inflatable bellows clamped about a pipe member. The bellows is an elastic material such as rubber or plastic and is hydraulically inflated to engage an inner surface of a surrounding tubular and may also act to prevent fluid flow as suggested by the Examiner.

However, the Examiner is kindly reminded that a reference must teach all the claim limitations. *Gjebedo* does not teach, show, or suggest an apparatus for connecting tubulars using a top drive, comprising at least one gripping element radially displaceable to drivingly engage a tubular and a sealing packer to inhibit, in use, fluid in said tubular from escaping therefrom, as recited in claims 15-16. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request withdrawal of the rejection.

Claims 10, 11 and 13 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over *Gjebedo* (WO 98/11322) in view of *Boyadejeff* (U.S. Pat. No. 4,605,077) and *Albright et al.* (U.S. Pat. No. 6,000,472).

Applicants have cancelled claims 1-14 for reasons stated above. Accordingly, withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

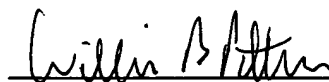
Claims 2, 12, 26-32, 34, and 35 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over *Gjebedo* (WO 98/11322) in view of *Delano* (U.S. Pat. No. 4,100,968). Claim 33 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over *Gjebedo* (WO 98/11322) in view of *Delano* (U.S. Pat. No. 4,100,968) as applied to claim 29 above, and further in view of *Boyadejeff* (U.S. Pat. No. 4,605,077) and *Albright et al.* (U.S. Pat. No. 6,000,472). The Examiner states that *Gjebedo* (WO 98/11322) teaches all the claimed limitations except for the spline recesses, the gripping member

having blades, and the casing support being carried by pneumatically operated weight-compensating pistons.

Applicants respectfully traverse the rejections. Applicants have cancelled claims 1-14 for reasons stated above, and respectfully request withdrawal of the rejections relating to those claims. Regarding claims 26-35, neither *Gjebedo*, nor a combination of the references, teach, show, or suggest all the limitations of the base claims. For example, a combination of the references does not teach, show, or suggest an apparatus for connecting tubulars having at least one recess disposed about an outer surface of the body, wherein each recess comprises a gripping element that is radially displaceable by hydraulic or pneumatic fluid to engage a tubular, as recited in base claims 26 and 29. Since claims 27 and 28 depend from claim 26 and claims 30-35 depend from claim 29, claims 27, 28, and 30-35 are patentable for at least the same reasons as claims 26 and 29. Accordingly, withdrawal of the rejection and allowance of the claims is respectfully requested.

In conclusion, the references cited by the Examiner, neither alone nor in combination, teach, show, or suggest the claimed invention. Having addressed all issues set out in the office action, Applicants respectfully submit that the claims are in condition for allowance and respectfully request that the claims be allowed.

Respectfully submitted,



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APPENDIX

Paragraph 14 has been amended as follows:

[0014] Preferred embodiments of the present invention will permit the casing to be picked up by single pickup elevators, connected either by rotation or mechanical latch, and then the casing running tool to be “stabbed” into the bore of the top joint without damage, due to the rubber bull-nose guide 216. When the tool is at the correct depth of penetration within the casing bore, the hydraulic piston is actuated to drive the grapple down onto the wedge lock and secure the grapple to the casing wall. As the casing string is lifted, the wedge-lock continues to drive into the grapple bore, providing an ever increasing wedge lock. The compression spring installed within the hydraulic piston provides a “positive-lock” or failsafe should the hydraulic system fail for any reason.

Paragraph 32 has been amended as follows:

[0032] The cylindrical body 2 is shown in Figure 1 in a section of casing [20] 30 with gripping elements 5 in a radially extended position, engaging the inner wall 31 of the section of casing 30 beneath a threaded box 32.